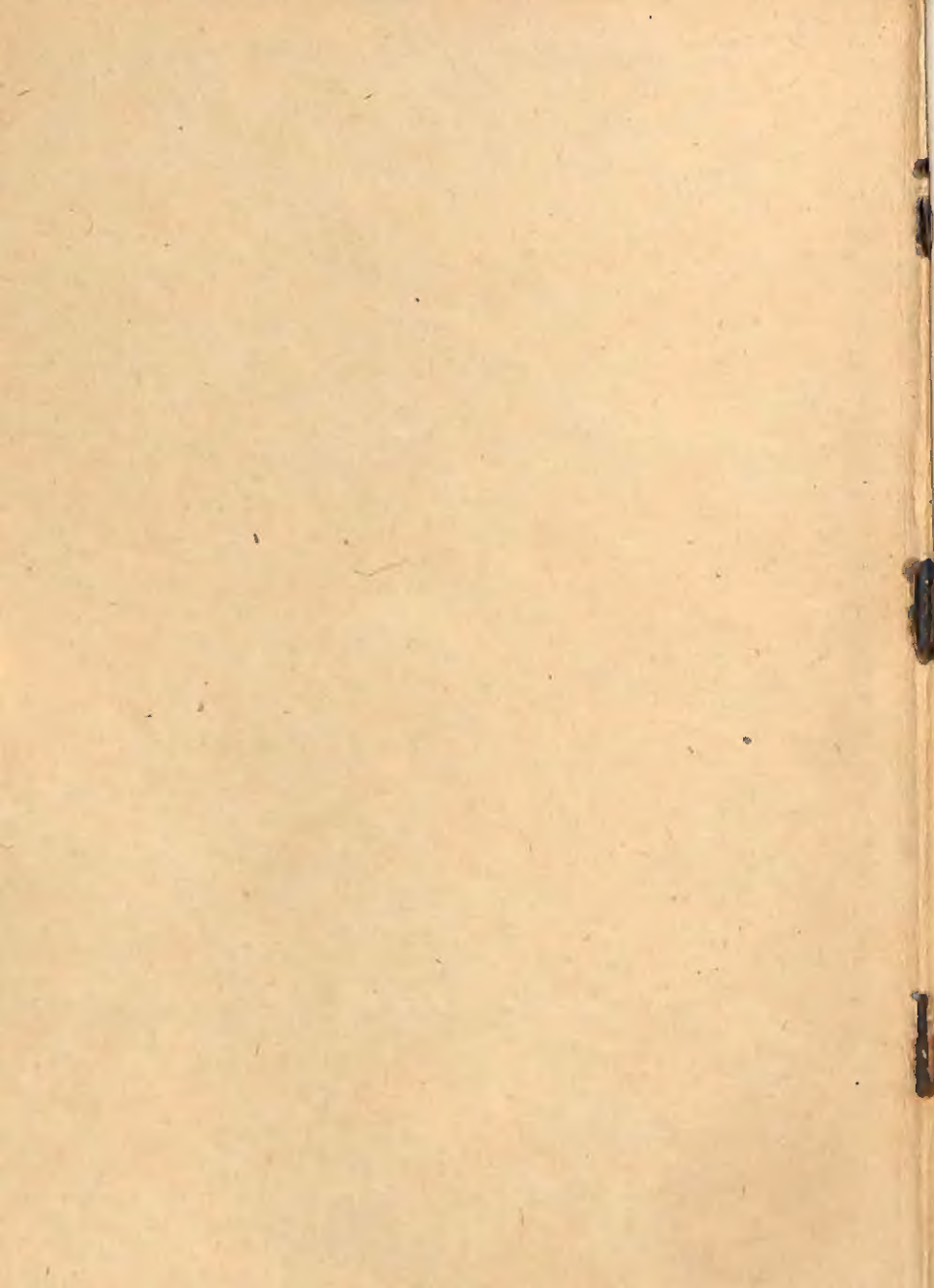


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AND OTHER PLAYS

A. E. PRITCHARD

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MODERN PLAYS FOR SCHOOLS. No. 2.

THE EMPTY HOUSE
AND OTHER PLAYS



Photo: E. J. Bigley

Stella and Geoffrcy

MODERN PLAYS FOR SCHOOLS

2

THE EMPTY HOUSE

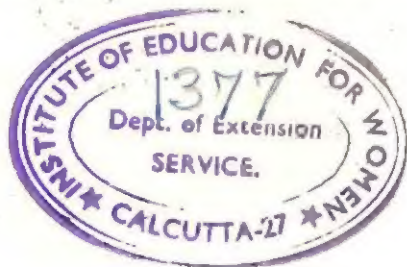
AND OTHER PLAYS

BY

A. E. PRITCHARD

*Assistant Master at Trescott Road Primary School,
Northfield, Birmingham*

THE EMPTY HOUSE
THE SHARK'S TOOTH
THE RUBY AND THE APPLE



MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1952

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First Edition 1949
Reprinted 1951, 1952

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

FOREWORD

SCHOOL play producers working among children who come from districts where resources are lacking are often hard put to it to find plays which will interest their pupils and fit their purses.

Gone are the days when children could be interested in "pretty-pretty" insubstantial plays. In a grim post-war world, just emerged from days and nights which will live long in our memories, a more robust kind of dramatic fare is wanted by the modern child.

These plays should appeal to the school child of today. They contain plenty of action. The background of each is well-known, because the setting is a true picture of hundreds of little homes up and down the country. The characters for the most part are as true as the setting; they are everyday types to the children who will have to play them.

This collection should prove useful at School play festivals.

M. RICHARDS

Theatre School Supervisor,

Birmingham Repertory Theatre.

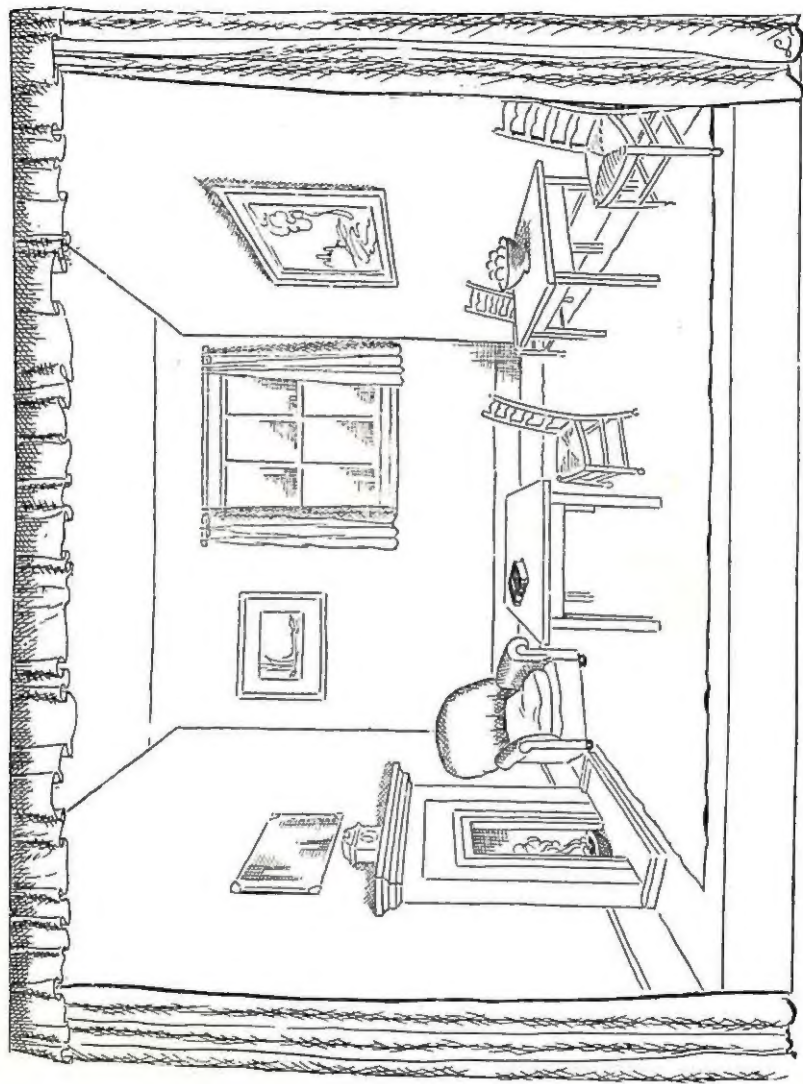
School Drama Adviser to Teachers' World, etc.

Thanks are due to Miss Mary Richards and Mr. Frank Worth for their many helpful criticisms and suggestions.

A. E. P.

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The Parkers' Living-Room

THE EMPTY HOUSE

Approximate acting time : thirty minutes.

CHARACTERS

FATHER (MR. PARKER)

MOTHER (MRS. PARKER)

GEOFFREY, their son

STELLA, their daughter

CAPTAIN KING, Mr. Parker's friend

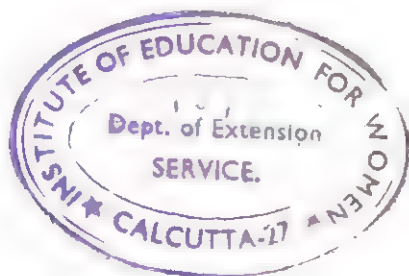
FRANK, Geoffrey's friend

THREE MASKED MEN

POLICEMAN

DETECTIVE

No fees are required for the performance of this play in schools, but the author and publisher would appreciate a reference to themselves on any programme or leaflet, and would be most interested to have a copy.



ESSENTIAL PROPERTIES

SCENE I

On stage.

Two tea-chests.

Three chairs.

A few books.

Off stage.

A halfpenny in Geoffrey's pocket.

Twopence halfpenny in Frank's pocket.

A black mask for each of the three men.

Notebook and pencil for 1st man.

SCENE II

On stage.

Newspaper for Father.

Clock.

Watch for Father.

Knitting for Mother.

Table.

Tea-things.

Tray.

Off stage.

(*Right-hand side.*)

A tray with one plate of bread and butter and one cup of tea.

Coat for Geoffrey.

Hat and coat for Father.

THE EMPTY HOUSE

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(Left-hand side.)

Bottle of lemonade for Frank.

Watch for Policeman.

Flower for 2nd man.

Card for Detective.

SCENE III

On stage.

Two tea-chests.

Three chairs.

A few books.

A length of rope for tying up Captain King.

Black mask for 3rd man.

Off stage.

Black masks for 1st and 2nd men.

THE EMPTY HOUSE

SCENE I

(A room in an empty house. Among the rubbish scattered about are two tea-chests, three or four old chairs and some old books. Geoffrey comes in, has a quick glance round, and calls to Frank.)

GEOFFREY *(calling)*. Frank, Frank, come here. Come and have a look at this. *(Frank comes in.)* This place looks rummy. I wonder who left all this rubbish behind.

FRANK. I don't know, but this would make a good place to come and play, wouldn't it? I'm sure nobody ever comes in here. The house has been empty for years.

GEOFFREY. Let's see if there's anything in these boxes. *(They examine the boxes and find some books.)* Only some old books.

FRANK. Look at these chairs. I'll bet we could sell them and get a lot of money for them.

GEOFFREY. We couldn't do that.

FRANK. Why not?

GEOFFREY. Because they're not ours. In any case they're too old to be of any use. We could make a castle with them, and you could try to capture it.

FRANK. No, let's play hide-and-seek.

GEOFFREY. No, let's explore today. We can play next time we come. Gosh, I'm thirsty.

FRANK. So am I. Shall I go and get some lemonade? I've got some money.

GEOFFREY. How much have you got?

FRANK. Twopence halfpenny.

GEOFFREY. That's not enough. It's threepence a bottle.

FRANK. Have you got a halfpenny?

GEOFFREY (*feeling in his pockets*). I don't think so. I spent all my pocket money this morning, and I won't have any more till next Saturday morning. Wait a minute. I think I can feel one at the bottom of my pocket. Yes, here you are.

FRANK (*taking the halfpenny*). Thanks. I won't be long. Will you stay here?

GEOFFREY. Yes. I'll explore the rest of the house, and then I'll hide, and when you come back you can try to find me.

FRANK. All right. I won't be long.

(*Frank dashes off. Geoffrey continues to examine the boxes. He picks up some of the books and looks at the titles.*)

GEOFFREY (*to himself*). I wonder what this book's about. What's this? Arithmetic! I don't want any more of that! (*He throws the book back into the box.*) What's this one? Geometry? I wonder what that means. (*He opens the book.*) Doesn't look very interesting to

THE EMPTY HOUSE

me. (*He throws it back into the box.*) I wish there was something interesting, like cowboys and Indians, or football or something. What do they want to write books on Arithmetic for? (*Steps are heard.*) Here's Frank back already. Where shall I hide?

(*He crawls into one of the tea-chests which is on its side. He has just hidden himself when a masked man comes in. The masked man looks around and comes into the centre of the room. He puts the other tea-chest upside down in the middle of the room, and arranges three chairs round it. As he is placing the third chair into position, a second masked man appears in the doorway, and stands there for a moment. The 1st man seats himself with his back to the door, and speaks without turning round.*)

1ST MAN. What is your password, Number Two?

2ND MAN. Black ace.

1ST MAN. Did anyone see you come in?

2ND MAN. No.

1ST MAN. Are you sure?

2ND MAN. Quite sure.

1ST MAN. Good. (*Pointing to the chair on his right.*) Sit here. (*The 2nd man sits.*)

2ND MAN. Why have we been called here?

1ST MAN. You'll be told that in good time.

(*A third masked man appears in the doorway. He stands listening to the conversation.*)

2ND MAN. Is it a big job?

1ST MAN. You'll be told in good time.

2ND MAN. How many more are helping?

1ST MAN. One.

2ND MAN. Where is he?

1ST MAN. He's waiting by the door. (*He speaks to the 3rd man without turning round.*) What is your password, Number Three?

3RD MAN. Black ace.

1ST MAN (*pointing to the third chair*). Sit here. (*The 3rd man sits.*) Did anyone see you come in?

3RD MAN. No.

1ST MAN. Are you sure?

3RD MAN. Absolutely certain.

1ST MAN. Good.

3RD MAN. Why have we been called here?

1ST MAN. Tomorrow at mid-day the *Royal Greyhound* starts her maiden voyage to the United States of America. She will have on board five million pounds of gold. Our job is to get the gold.

2ND MAN. How?

1ST MAN. My plan is simple, and if all goes well, there'll be little risk. Now listen carefully. The *Royal Greyhound* sails tomorrow at twelve o'clock noon. The Captain will go aboard at nine o'clock.

2ND MAN. What has the Captain to do with your plans?

1ST MAN. A good deal. What would happen if the Captain suddenly fell sick?

2ND MAN. The Shipping Company would have to find another captain.



Photo: E. J. Bigley

The Three Masked Men

1ST MAN. Right. Well, Captain King is not going to sail on the *Royal Greyhound* tomorrow.

3RD MAN. How do you know?

1ST MAN. I'm coming to that. I've been watching Captain King for the last week, and I've noticed that he goes to see Mr. Parker, a friend of his, every night at seven o'clock. You two must kidnap the Captain as he's on his way to Mr. Parker and bring him here.

3RD MAN. How long will he be kept here?

1ST MAN. He'll stay here until we've taken the gold off the *Royal Greyhound*.

2ND MAN. How will you get the gold from the *Royal Greyhound*?

1ST MAN. The crew of the ship will receive a message to say that Captain King has been taken ill, and someone else will take his place. I, of course, will take his place.

2ND MAN. You? But how?

1ST MAN. I shall send the message early tomorrow morning, and shall be there myself soon afterwards, so that there'll be no time for them to make inquiries. Once I'm on board I shall have charge of the keys of the safe. The rest will be easy. (*There is a banging at the outside door. The three men look first at one another, and then in the direction of the noise.*) Did you lock the outside door when you came in, Number Three?

3RD MAN. Yes, I made sure of the door.

1ST MAN. Go to the window and see who it is.

(The 3rd man goes out, and after a short while comes back. The other two sit quietly listening. The banging continues.)

3RD MAN *(coming in)*. It's a boy trying to get in. He's banging the door with a bottle of lemonade. I thought he was going to knock the door down. Anyhow he can't get in.

(The banging at the door stops.)

1ST MAN. Good. Now let's get on with the business.

3RD MAN. Won't Mr. Parker be suspicious if Captain King doesn't turn up at his usual time tonight? He'll start asking questions.

1ST MAN. Yes. Number Two, you will go to Mr. Parker after kidnapping Captain King, and explain that he won't be coming to make his usual visit because he's been called back to his ship.

2ND MAN. When shall I go to Mr. Parker?

1ST MAN. At half past seven. That will give you time to get there after bringing Captain King here. I'll come back here to get any information from him that will be useful to me.

2ND MAN. How will you know if the kidnapping has been successful?

1ST MAN. You must wear a flower in your coat when you visit Mr. Parker. I'll be in the street, watching for it.

2ND MAN. I see.

1ST MAN. Any more questions?

2ND MAN. No.

3RD MAN. No.

1ST MAN. Good. We'll now leave this house one at a time to avoid attracting attention. The new password is "Cat's eye". Number Three, go now. *(The 3rd man goes out. The other two watch him in silence.)* You won't forget, Number Two, to go to Mr. Parker immediately after bringing Captain King here. You should be there by half past seven. Remember to pin a flower to your coat as a sign to me that all's well.

2ND MAN. I'll remember.

1ST MAN. Good. You must go now, and see that you don't fail.

(The 2nd man goes out. The 1st man takes out a small notebook and pencil, and makes a few notes. Geoffrey's head slowly appears round the side of the tea-chest. He sees the 1st man still sitting there, and quickly disappears again. The 1st man closes his notebook, puts it in his pocket and quietly goes out. After he has gone, Geoffrey comes out from his hiding-place and speaks to himself.)

GEOFFREY. Gosh! What a plot! I must go to the police and tell them, and perhaps they'll save Captain King from being kidnapped. No, I won't go to the police, I'll go home and tell Father. No, I think I'll go to Captain King first. *(Steps are heard.)* I'll bet this is Frank. *(Calling)* Frank.

THE EMPTY HOUSE

come here. There's been a secret . . . (*A Policeman comes in.*) Oh! I thought, I mean, I didn't know . . .

POLICEMAN. You didn't know I was coming, did you?

GEOFFREY. No.

POLICEMAN. You know you shouldn't be in here, don't you?

GEOFFREY. Well, Sir, . . .

POLICEMAN. What have you been up to, eh?

GEOFFREY. Something has been going on in here that you should know about.

POLICEMAN. Oh, has there?

GEOFFREY. Yes, something very important.

POLICEMAN. Oh, indeed! And what's that?

GEOFFREY. Three men are going to kidnap Captain King. They were in here wearing masks.

POLICEMAN. I've heard fairy stories like that before.

GEOFFREY. But it's true, every word of it. You must warn Captain King, or they'll kidnap him.

POLICEMAN. And what do you think Captain King, would say to me if I told him that? I suppose you've been reading this in a book, eh?

GEOFFREY. No, no! They're going to kidnap the Captain. I heard them.

POLICEMAN. That's quite enough about kidnapping the Captain. You haven't told me yet what you're doing in here. Don't you know you're trespassing?

GEOFFREY. No—I mean—I mean, yes. Oh, I don't

know. We must go to Captain King. They're going to capture the *Royal Greyhound*.

POLICEMAN. The *Royal Greyhound*? You said just now they were going to capture the Captain. Now make up your mind. Which do you mean, the Captain or the ship?

GEOFFREY. Both.

POLICEMAN. Now look here, my lad, I'm not going to waste any more time with your fairy stories. You've got no business here, and if you're not gone in half a minute, I'm going to take your name and address.

GEOFFREY. But you *must* listen. It's very important. They're going to steal all the gold on the *Royal Greyhound*.

POLICEMAN. The gold? First it was Captain King, then it was the *Royal Greyhound*, and now it's the gold. What are they going to take next?

GEOFFREY. That's all. Are you going to stop them?

POLICEMAN. No. But I'm going to stop you coming in here to play. Now come on.

GEOFFREY. No, I won't go until you promise to help.

POLICEMAN. You won't go, eh?

GEOFFREY. No.

POLICEMAN. I see. It looks as if I'll have to take your name and address after all.

GEOFFREY. *Please* help me capture those men.

POLICEMAN. Capture fiddlesticks! You don't think I believe that rubbish, do you?

GEOFFREY. It isn't rubbish. I heard every word they said.

POLICEMAN. I know what I'll do. I'll take you along to your father, and he can deal with you. Come on.

GEOFFREY. No.

POLICEMAN (*catching hold of his arm*). Come on. (*They go out.*)

CURTAIN

SCENE II

(*The living-room in Mr. Parker's house. Mrs. Parker is collecting up the tea-things on the centre table. Mr. Parker is sitting by the fire, to right of stage, reading his newspaper. Stella is helping her mother.*)

MOTHER. I can't understand what's happened to Geoffrey. He's never been as late as this.

FATHER. There's no need to worry. He can look after himself.

MOTHER. But you never know what's happened. Anything could have happened to him. Stella, run down to the corner and see if he's coming.

STELLA. Shall I put my coat on?

MOTHER. No, no, go just as you are, and hurry, there's a good girl.

STELLA. All right, Mummy. (*Stella goes out.*)

MOTHER. Do you think he's had an accident?

FATHER. Of course he hasn't. We should have heard before now if he had.

MOTHER. But perhaps he can't tell them where he lives.
He might be unconscious.

FATHER. I don't know what you're worrying yourself
like this for. Just because he's an hour late for his
tea.

MOTHER. I wish you'd go down to the hospital or the
police and make inquiries.

FATHER. I tell you there's no need for you to worry.
He'll turn up all right. He always does.

MOTHER. But you hear of such things happening. You
don't know what to think. (*Stella comes back.*)
Could you see him, Stella?

STELLA. No, Mummy, I couldn't see him anywhere.

MOTHER. There you are. I know something's hap-
pened. He wouldn't be as late as this if he were all
right.

FATHER. If he's not back in half an hour, I'll go out
and see if I can find him.

STELLA. I think Geoffrey went out playing with Frank.

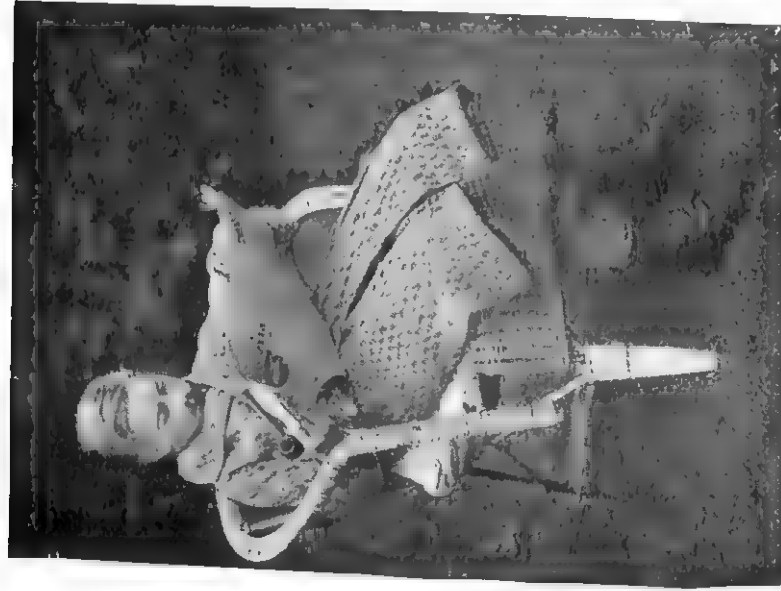
MOTHER. Where were they going?

STELLA. I don't know. Geoffrey wouldn't tell me. He
said it was a secret.

MOTHER. Well, wherever he went, he should have been
home long ago. He's been gone since half past two.
Look at the clock, it's half past six.

STELLA. Perhaps he's gone to Frank's house for tea.
Shall I go and see?

(*There is a knock at the door.*)



Mr. Parker



Photo: E. J. Bigley

Mrs. Parker

MOTHER. I wonder who that is? (*Mother goes to the door.*) Hello, Frank. Come in, dear. (*Frank comes in with a bottle of lemonade.*) Has Geoffrey been playing with you this afternoon?

FRANK. Yes. Hasn't he come home yet?

MOTHER. No, not yet. We wondered if you knew where he was.

FRANK. I thought he'd come home. I went to get some lemonade, and when I got back, he was gone. So I thought he'd gone home.

FATHER. Don't you know where he is?

FRANK. No. I came round to bring him his share of the lemonade.

FATHER. What time was it when you saw him last?

FRANK. About half past five, I think. It might have been a bit later.

FATHER. Where was he when you left him?

FRANK. I think it was in Andrew Street.

FATHER. Whatever were you doing there?

FRANK. We were exploring.

FATHER. Exploring what?

FRANK. Just exploring.

FATHER. You must have been exploring something.
(*To Mother*) It looks to me as if they've been up to some mischief. (*To Frank*) What were you doing?

FRANK. We were exploring an empty house.

FATHER. I think I know which one it was. Did you

see a notice outside—"Trespassers will be prosecuted"?

FRANK. Yes.

FATHER. Don't you know what that means?

FRANK. I suppose it means we shouldn't have gone in.

FATHER. Yes. And it means that the policeman will take your name and address if you do.

FRANK. We didn't see a policeman.

FATHER. That doesn't make any difference. It means you mustn't go in there at all.

FRANK. I see. Well, I shall know another time.

MOTHER. I wish he'd hurry up. Stella, go and see if he's coming.

STELLA. Yes, Mummy. *(Stella goes out.)*

MOTHER. That boy is more worry to me than ten boys should be.

FATHER. I think I'll go along to Andrew Street and see if I can find him. If he's not there, I'll ask the police to look out for him.

(Stella comes back excited.)

STELLA. Geoffrey's just turned the corner, and a policeman's with him.

FRANK. Have they handcuffed him?

MOTHER. Don't be a silly boy, Frank. I wonder what he's been up to now. What will the neighbours think?

(The Policeman comes in with Geoffrey. Geoffrey is speaking to him.)

GEOFFREY. They were dangerous men, too, and I'll bet they carried revolvers.

FATHER (*to Policeman*). What's he been up to now?

POLICEMAN. I found him playing in that empty house in Andrew Street. He started arguing, so I thought I'd better bring him home.

FATHER. Geoffrey, do you know your mother's been worrying about you for the last hour?

MOTHER. If I were not so worried about you, I should be very angry with you. Are you sure you haven't had an accident?

GEOFFREY. Me, Mother? I haven't had an accident, but I very nearly did.

POLICEMAN. He's been reading a book about some masked men, and he thinks he saw some in the empty house.

GEOFFREY. I did see them. They said they were going to capture the *Royal Greyhound*, and steal the gold and kidnap Captain King.

POLICEMAN. I told him that people aren't kidnapped these days, but he won't listen to me.

FATHER. Where did you get these ideas from, Geoffrey?

GEOFFREY. I didn't get them from anywhere. After Frank had gone to get some lemonade, three masked men came in and began plotting to kidnap Captain King.

FATHER. You know you shouldn't have been in the house, don't you?

GEOFFREY. Yes, Father.

FATHER. You've been very disobedient, and you've been very thoughtless, too, trying to mislead the policeman with your stories.

POLICEMAN. Fairy tales, I call them.

GEOFFREY. They're not fairy tales. Please will you go to Captain King, before it's too late?

FATHER. Captain King will be here soon after seven o'clock, and then you can tell him yourself. What is the correct time, Constable?

POLICEMAN (*looking at his watch*). It's seven-eighteen exactly.

GEOFFREY. Then it's too late. He won't come now. One of the men will come and tell you he's been called back to his ship.

POLICEMAN. I must be getting along, or I shall be late for duty. (*To Geoffrey*) And now, young man, if I find you in that empty house again, I shall take your name and address.

FATHER. I'll see that he doesn't get in there again.

POLICEMAN. Good. And now I must be saying good night.

FATHER. Good night. (*Policeman goes out.*)

MOTHER. Now, Geoffrey, you must have your tea—though you deserve to be sent to bed for the worry you've caused.

GEOFFREY. I'm sorry, Mother, but I didn't know those men were going to . . .

FATHER. I don't want to hear any more about masked men tonight.

(Mother takes out the tea-things on a tray.)

GEOFFREY. But, Father, I didn't make it up. I'll bet Captain King's been kidnapped by now.

FATHER. He should have been here at seven o'clock.
(Looking at his watch.) According to the Constable's time it's twenty-five minutes past seven.

GEOFFREY. Captain King won't come tonight now, but one of the masked men will come at half past seven to tell you that he's gone back to his ship.

FATHER. Don't talk nonsense, Geoffrey. You don't expect anyone to believe that rubbish, do you?

(Mother brings in some food and a cup of tea on a tray. She puts it on the centre table.)

MOTHER. Come along, Geoffrey, and have your tea.

(Geoffrey sits at the table and begins his tea. Father picks up his newspaper and continues reading. Mother sits by the fire, knitting. Stella and Frank stand round Geoffrey.)

FRANK. Why did you lock the door?

GEOFFREY. I didn't. One of the masked men did.

FRANK. I banged on the door and shook it as hard as I could, but it wouldn't open.

GEOFFREY. I heard you banging the door, but I couldn't open it because the men were there.

FRANK. Where did they come from?

GEOFFREY. I don't know.

STELLA. Why didn't they see you?

GEOFFREY. Because I was hiding in a box. It wasn't half dusty in there too. I nearly sneezed twice.

STELLA. Look at your hands, Geoffrey. You haven't washed them since you came in.

GEOFFREY. Oh, no. I forgot.

MOTHER. Didn't you wash your hands before you had your tea?

GEOFFREY. No, Mother. I forgot.

MOTHER. Then go and wash them this minute. And give them a good scrub, too.

GEOFFREY. Yes, Mother. (*He goes out.*)

FATHER (*looking at his watch*). Captain King's late tonight. It's half past seven already. (*There is a knock at the door.*) Oh, here he is at last. (*Calling*) Come in, Ben. What are you standing out there for?

(*2nd man, no longer masked, comes in, wearing a flower in his coat.*)

2ND MAN. Good evening. I think you must have mistaken me for Captain King.

FATHER. Yes, I was expecting him.

2ND MAN. I'm a friend of his. He asked me a few minutes ago if I would come round and tell you that he's sorry he can't come to you this evening.

FATHER. Can't come? Why? What's happened?

2ND MAN. He had an urgent call from the Shipping Company telling him to return to his ship, so he had to rush off without any warning.

MOTHER. What a shame!

2ND MAN. He's very upset himself, and he said he hoped you would understand.

FATHER. Yes, of course. I expect we shall hear from him in a day or two.

2ND MAN. Yes, I expect you will. I'm afraid that's all I can tell you.

FATHER. It was very good of you to let us know. I hope it hasn't inconvenienced you.

2ND MAN. No, no, not at all. Good night. (*He goes out.*)

FATHER. Good night. (*Geoffrey comes in as 2nd man goes out.*) It looks as though we shall have to change our plans for the evening.

GEOFFREY. What's happened?

FATHER. Captain King has sent a message that he can't come tonight.

GEOFFREY. I knew he wouldn't come. That's part of the plot.

FATHER. You don't mean to say that you believe that nonsense, do you?

GEOFFREY. It's true, every word of it.

FATHER. It just happens to be a coincidence, that's all.

MOTHER. Now get on with your tea, Geoffrey. It's nearly bed-time.

GEOFFREY. I wish I knew what I could do to prove it.

FRANK. We could go back to the empty house and see if Captain King's there.

FATHER. I see what you're getting at. You want to go back to that house, and you think this is a good excuse.

GEOFFREY. We could soon prove it if we went.

FATHER. I thought there was something behind it all. Well, you're not going.

GEOFFREY. I wish I knew what . . . Oh, I've got it! Did that man who told you about Captain King have a flower in his coat?

FATHER. I don't know. I didn't see one.

GEOFFREY. Did you see one, Mother?

MOTHER. Just a minute. Let me finish counting these stitches.

STELLA. Yes, he had one. I saw it. Did you see it, Frank?

FRANK. I didn't notice it.

STELLA. I remember it ever so plainly.

MOTHER. What do you want now, Geoffrey?

GEOFFREY. Did you notice if that man who came in just now had a flower in his coat?

MOTHER. Yes, he had. I thought how nice it looked.

GEOFFREY. There you are. Perhaps you'll believe me now. It's all part of the plot.

FATHER. I didn't notice it. Anyhow, what's that got to do with Captain King?

GEOFFREY. I keep telling you it's part of the plot. That man was told to wear a flower in his coat, so that

the chief man would know that Captain King had been kidnapped.

FATHER. It seems fantastic to me, but there might be something in it.

GEOFFREY. Of course there is. Shall we go round to the house and catch the men?

FATHER. Oh, no, you can't come. It wouldn't be safe for you to come. I'm going round to the police to see if they will check up and make sure.

GEOFFREY. Please let me come. I can show you where to go.

FATHER. No. You must stay here. It's nearly bed-time.
(*There is a knock at the door.*) I wonder who this is?
(*Father goes to the door and admits a Detective.*)

DETECTIVE. Good evening. Are you Mr. Parker?

FATHER. Yes.

DETECTIVE. I should like to have a few words with Captain King.

FATHER. Captain King?

DETECTIVE. Yes.

FATHER. Who are you?

DETECTIVE. I beg your pardon, Mr. Parker. I should have explained before that I'm from Scotland Yard.
(*Showing Father a card.*) This is my authority.

FATHER (*reading card*). I see. I thought you would have known that Captain King has been recalled to his ship.

DETECTIVE. How do you know?

FATHER. A friend came round and told us a few minutes ago.

DETECTIVE. That's curious. You see, I've come here from Scotland Yard to make arrangements for the safe custody of the gold which is going to America. I called at Captain King's house, and his wife said he'd come round here to see you. Now you say he hasn't turned up. Well, where is he?

GEOFFREY. He's been kidnapped and taken to an empty house.

DETECTIVE. What's this?

FATHER. Ever since Geoffrey came home, he's been on about Captain King being kidnapped and taken to an empty house. We thought he'd been reading a book, so we took no notice of him.

DETECTIVE. How do you know all this?

GEOFFREY. I was playing in the empty house when three masked men came in, and began plotting to kidnap the Captain and steal the gold from the *Royal Greyhound*.

DETECTIVE. If this is true, there isn't a moment to be lost. We'll get a constable and raid the house. (*To Geoffrey*) Could you find this house again?

GEOFFREY. Yes.

DETECTIVE. Good. Get your coat on quickly. (*Geoffrey goes out.*) Will you come, Mr. Parker?

FATHER. Certainly.
(*Geoffrey comes in, putting on his coat. Father goes out.*)

MOTHER. Now you'll be a good boy, won't you, Geoffrey?

GEOFFREY. Yes, Mother, of course.

(Father comes in, putting on his hat and coat.)

DETECTIVE. Everybody ready? Right. Come on, let's hurry. *(Father, Geoffrey and the Detective go out.)*

CURTAIN

SCENE III

(The room in the empty house as in Scene 1. Captain King is tied to one of the chairs. The 3rd man, masked, is sitting in a chair with his back to the door, talking to him.)

3RD MAN. I don't know how long you'll be here—not more than two or three days, I should think.

CAPTAIN KING. But the *Royal Greyhound* sails tomorrow, and I must be on board tomorrow morning.

3RD MAN. There's no need for you to worry. Someone else will take your place.

CAPTAIN KING. But I have vital information for the Shipping Company.

3RD MAN. Such as what?

CAPTAIN KING. The new Captain will want to know where the keys are. I suppose you know that five million pounds in gold is being shipped to America.

3RD MAN. Yes.

CAPTAIN KING. No one can open the safe unless I'm there. What will happen when the ship gets to America, and they can't open the safe?

3RD MAN. Perhaps they'll force it.

CAPTAIN KING. Impossible.

3RD MAN. Suppose the gold doesn't reach America.

CAPTAIN KING. Oh, they'll get it there all right. It will be well guarded.

(The 1st man, masked, appears in the doorway.)

3RD MAN. How do you know? Perhaps the new Captain won't be so particular.

CAPTAIN KING. Who'll be the new Captain?

1ST MAN. I will. *(Coming forward)* You need have no worry about the ship or the gold. They'll both be well looked after.

CAPTAIN KING. Who are you?

1ST MAN. The new Captain.

CAPTAIN KING. But who are you? What's your name? Where do you come from?

1ST MAN. You're asking too many questions. There's no need to worry about names. Now tell me, where do you keep the keys of the safe?

CAPTAIN KING. I can't tell you.

1ST MAN. There's no need for you to worry, Captain King. I'm the new Captain of the *Royal Greyhound*, and I must have the keys.

CAPTAIN KING. I haven't got them.

1ST MAN. Do you know where they are?

CAPTAIN KING. Yes.

1ST MAN. Where are they?

CAPTAIN KING. I can't tell you.

1ST MAN. But I'm the new Captain, and I'll need them.

CAPTAIN KING. Do you expect me to believe that?

1ST MAN. What do you mean?

CAPTAIN KING. Why did you bring me here and tie me up?

1ST MAN. I'm sorry to have used force, but you'll be well fed and well looked after. You're in no danger at all if you're sensible.

CAPTAIN KING. If you're the new Captain of the *Royal Greyhound*, why are you wearing a mask?

1ST MAN. Does it bother you?

CAPTAIN KING. No.

1ST MAN. Shall we forget it then? Now, all I want are the keys. Where are they?

CAPTAIN KING. I can't tell you.

1ST MAN. Oh, come, Captain. How can I command the ship without keys?

CAPTAIN KING. You'll have to get them from the Shipping Company.

1ST MAN. It will be more convenient if I have yours.

CAPTAIN KING. They're not here.

1ST MAN (*to 3rd man*). Have you searched him?

3RD MAN. Yes.

1ST MAN. Did you find anything?

3RD MAN. No.

(*The 2nd man, masked, appears in the doorway.*)

1ST MAN. What is your password?

2ND MAN. Cat's eye.

1ST MAN. Come in, Number Two. Is Mr. Parker satisfied?

2ND MAN. Yes.

1ST MAN. Good. All we need now are the keys.

2ND MAN. There's one thing you should know.

1ST MAN. What's that?

2ND MAN. Just after I left Mr. Parker's house, I saw a Scotland Yard detective who's been following me for weeks.

1ST MAN. Did he see you?

2ND MAN. I'm not sure, but I don't think so.

1ST MAN. That's all right then.

2ND MAN. He must know something because I watched him, and he went straight to Mr. Parker's house.

1ST MAN. Did he follow you?

2ND MAN. No, I'm sure of that.

1ST MAN. In that case, he can't know where we are.

2ND MAN. No, I'm sure he doesn't know where we are.

1ST MAN. Now, Captain King, you can see our business is very urgent.

CAPTAIN KING. I can see that you're a lot of thieves.

1ST MAN. There's no need to call each other names. We can settle this quietly. Let me have those keys, and you'll be free in two days.

CAPTAIN KING. You can't have them.

1ST MAN. I'll have to use force then.

CAPTAIN KING. What do you want them for?

1ST MAN. I'll tell you. When I become the Captain of the *Royal Greyhound* tomorrow morning, I'll have charge of the safe where the gold is kept.

CAPTAIN KING. I thought you were after the gold.

1ST MAN. I've made arrangements to take the gold off the ship during the second night at sea. When I've got the gold, I'll quietly disappear.

CAPTAIN KING (*struggling*). If I could only get away from here!

1ST MAN. All my arrangements are complete except for the keys.

CAPTAIN KING. There's one thing you've forgotten.

1ST MAN. What's that?

CAPTAIN KING. The detective. He's bound to find me.

1ST MAN. You needn't worry about him. He doesn't know where you are. Now then, Captain, are you going to tell me where those keys are?

(*Unnoticed by the masked men, the Detective appears in the doorway.*)

CAPTAIN KING. No.

1ST MAN. I'm a generous man, Captain King, and I'll pay you a thousand pounds for those keys.

CAPTAIN KING. I'll never tell you where they are.

1ST MAN. You shall have one more chance. Where are those keys?

DETECTIVE. I have them. (*They turn sharply round to him.*)

2ND MAN. You?

DETECTIVE. Yes.

1ST MAN (*to 2nd man*). Who is he?

2ND MAN. He's the detective from Scotland Yard.

1ST MAN (*to Detective*). How did you know we were here?

DETECTIVE. From information received.

1ST MAN. We're three to one. What are we waiting for?

DETECTIVE. Wait a minute. You might just as well know that this house is surrounded, and a police officer is waiting outside the door now.

1ST MAN. I don't believe you. (*He goes to the door, but the Policeman bars his way.*)

POLICEMAN. Oh, no. You can't go yet.

1ST MAN (*to Detective*). What do you want?

DETECTIVE. First of all I want to set Captain King free. (*He frees Captain King.*)

CAPTAIN KING. Thank you very much.

DETECTIVE. Now I want to see who you are. (*Taking off the mask of the 1st man*) John Bee! This is a good day's work. So we've caught you at last! Who are these other two?

1ST MAN. Two of my helpers. (*To 2nd and 3rd men*) Take your masks off. (*They take them off.*) Someone's betrayed us. (*To Detective*) Who was it?

DETECTIVE (*to Policeman*). Ask Mr. Parker and Geoffrey to come in. (*The Policeman opens the door, and brings in Father and Geoffrey.*) We have to thank this lad for showing us where you were.

1ST MAN (*to Geoffrey*). How did you know where we were?

GEOFFREY. I was hiding in that box while you were plotting here this afternoon.

1ST MAN. Were you in here when I came in?

GEOFFREY. Yes.

1ST MAN. Could you hear everything we said?

GEOFFREY. Yes.

1ST MAN. Beaten by a boy! And five million pounds lost!

CAPTAIN KING. Well done, Geoffrey.

DETECTIVE. Well done, lad. You deserve a reward for this. Is there anything you'd like?

GEOFFREY. Yes.

DETECTIVE. What's that?

GEOFFREY. I should like to come in here and play.

DETECTIVE (*to Policeman*). Can you arrange this, Constable?

POLICEMAN. Yes. I think I could.

DETECTIVE. Good. I hope you'll enjoy yourself, Geoffrey. Now then, you three, come along.

(*The Detective goes out first, followed by the Policeman, Captain King, Father and the three men. Geoffrey picks*

up one of the masks, puts it on, sits in the 1st man's chair, and says, "Black ace." Father pokes his head round the door.)

FATHER. Come along, Geoffrey.

GEOFFREY (*he puts the mask in his pocket*). All right, Father. I'm coming. (*He goes out.*)

CURTAIN

THE SHARK'S TOOTH

Approximate acting time : thirty minutes.

CHARACTERS

FATHER (MR. PARKER)

MOTHER (MRS. PARKER)

GEOFFREY, their son

STELLA, their daughter

CAPTAIN KING, Mr. Parker's friend

MRS. ABBOTT, Mrs. Parker's friend

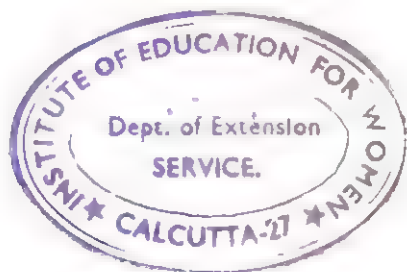
FRANK, Geoffrey's friend

ANN, Stella's friend

POLICEMAN

THREE GHOSTS

No fees are required for the performance of this play in schools, but the author and publisher would appreciate a reference to themselves on any programme or leaflet, and would be most interested to have a copy.



ESSENTIAL PROPERTIES

SCENE I

On stage.

Four chairs.

Coal-scuttle.

Vase in coal-scuttle.

Doll for Stella.

Engine for Geoffrey.

Centre table.

Clothes for ironing.

Iron and iron stand.

Side table.

Flowers in a jam-jar.

Off stage.

(Right-hand side.)

Hat and coat for Mother.

(Left-hand side.)

Vase wrapped up (Mrs. Abbott's present).

Shark's tooth and handkerchief for Captain King.

Doll and card in parcel for Stella.

Trousers in parcel for Geoffrey.

Book in parcel for Stella.

SCENE II

On stage.

Four chairs.

Clothes airing on clothes-horse.

Coal-scuttle.

Centre table.

Book for Geoffrey.

Side table.

Flowers in vase.

Pipe for Father.

Off stage.

(Right-hand side.)

Hats and coats for Father, Mother and Stella.

Two pairs of boots and a boot-brush.

Umbrella.

Jacket with three theatre tickets in pocket.

SCENE III

On stage.

Four chairs.

Clothes airing on clothes-horse.

First Ghost behind clothes-horse.

Knife for First Ghost.

Centre table.

Book for Geoffrey.

Side table.

Flowers in vase.

Off stage.

(Left-hand side.)

Truncheon for Policeman.

THE SHARK'S TOOTH

SCENE I

(A small living-room with a table in the centre and one to the left, on which is a jam-jar of flowers. The fireplace is on the right-hand side. A coal-scuttle is by the fireplace. In the coal-scuttle is hidden a vase similar to Mrs. Abbott's present. Stella is sitting on a chair near the side table, playing with a doll. Geoffrey is on the floor, playing with a clockwork engine. Mother is ironing.)

STELLA. Will you take me to town with you this morning, Mummy?

MOTHER. No, Stella, not this morning. Mrs. Abbott is coming with me to the Sales and we shall be in a hurry.

STELLA. Geoffrey went last week.

GEOFFREY. She always wants to do the same as me.

MOTHER. I'm going to town again tonight with Daddy. You can come then instead.

GEOFFREY. Can I come tonight, too?

MOTHER. No, it's Stella's turn this week. You must stay behind and look after the house.

GEOFFREY. You could lock the door.

MOTHER. You're not coming tonight, so don't let me hear any more about it.

GEOFFREY. Oh, Stella has everything. You always let

her go. (*Mother continues with her ironing.*) Can I, Mother? (*Mother takes no notice.*) Can I, Mother? Can I?

MOTHER. What do you want now? You do nothing but worry me from morning till night.

GEOFFREY. Can I come with you to town tonight?

MOTHER. No. How many more times do you want to be told?— — — I must put this ironing away or I shan't be ready when Mrs. Abbott comes. (*She folds up the clothes and goes out with them, while the children go on playing. As soon as his mother has gone out, Geoffrey looks towards the door to make sure that she isn't watching, and then deliberately drives the engine into Stella's feet.*)

GEOFFREY. Get out of my way, you.

STELLA. Leave me alone. You did that on purpose.

(*Mother comes back with her hat and coat. She puts the coat on, and feels in the pocket for something.*)

MOTHER. Have either of you seen my latch-key?

CHILDREN (*together*). No.

MOTHER. Stella, go upstairs and see if Daddy has left his key in his overcoat pocket.

(*Mother puts on her hat. Stella goes out.*)

GEOFFREY. Can I come with you this morning?

MOTHER. Bless the boy, no. You'll stay here with Stella, and if you bother me any more, I'll send you to bed.

STELLA (*coming back*). It isn't in Daddy's pocket.

(*There is a knock at the door.*)

MOTHER. I expect that's Mrs. Abbott. (*Mother goes to the door and admits Mrs. Abbott.*) Come in, Mrs. Abbott, I'm nearly ready.

MRS. ABBOTT. I've brought you round a birthday present. (*Mrs. Abbott gives Mother a parcel wrapped in brown paper.*)

MOTHER. Really, Mrs. Abbott, that's very kind of you. What is it? I must see what it is before we go. (*Mother unties the parcel, holds up the vase, and admires it.*) Oh, isn't that lovely! It's just what I want. We won't have that jam-jar on the table any more. Geoffrey, go and put some water in this vase, and you, Stella, take that jam-jar away.

(*Stella takes the jam-jar away, and Geoffrey goes out with the vase.*)

MRS. ABBOTT. I'm glad you like it.

MOTHER. Like it? Why, I've been wanting a vase like that for years. (*The children come back, Geoffrey holding the vase, which now has the flowers in it. Mother takes the vase and arranges the flowers. She puts the vase on the side table, stands back and admires it.*) Now, you two must look after the house while I'm gone and not go out in the street to play. If you're good children, I'll bring you something back.

GEOFFREY. Will you bring me a train set?

MOTHER. A train set? You'll get no train set this week, my boy. I'm getting you a pair of trousers. Look at this, Mrs. Abbott. (*Shows her a patch in his trousers.*) He went climbing trees yesterday afternoon after he

came out of school. You should have seen him when he came home. (*To Geoffrey*) You don't care what you look like, do you?

STELLA. Could I have a doll with fair hair, and eyes that go to sleep?

MOTHER. I'll bring you something. Goodbye, and be good children.

STELLA. Goodbye.

(*Mother and Mrs. Abbott go out. The children go back to their play.*)

STELLA. I wish I had a doll with fair hair.

GEOFFREY. What's the good of dolls? You can't do anything with them. They're not like trains that go by themselves. Dolls can't do anything.

STELLA. Yes, they can.

GEOFFREY. They can't. Everybody knows that.

STELLA. They can.

GEOFFREY. Don't talk rubbish. What can they do?

STELLA. I shan't tell you.

GEOFFREY. There you are, you don't know yourself. Of course dolls can't do anything.

STELLA. They can.

(*A knock is heard.*)

GEOFFREY. Who's that? (*Goes to door.*) Oh, come in, Frank. I can't go out, because Mother has gone to the Sales and we've got to look after the house.

(*Frank comes in. He picks up the engine.*)

FRANK. Jolly good engine! What's its name?

GEOFFREY. *The Flying Englishman.*

*(The two boys start playing together on the floor.
Another knock is heard.)*

GEOFFREY. Oh, bother, there's somebody else. *(Goes to door and comes back with Ann.)* Ann's come to see you, Stella.

STELLA. Hello, Ann. Mother might bring me back another doll today.

ANN. What sort? Like this one?

STELLA. No, one that goes to sleep.

GEOFFREY *(to Frank)*. Do you know what Stella says? She says dolls can walk, run and talk. Look at it—a bit of painted rag.

STELLA. This isn't painted rag—look.

GEOFFREY. Catch me playing with a thing like that.

ANN. We don't want you to. If you had it, you wouldn't know what to do with it.

GEOFFREY. I should.

FRANK. So should I.

STELLA. What would you do?

GEOFFREY. Throw it in the dust-bin, of course.

STELLA. You wouldn't throw this one in the dust-bin.

GEOFFREY. Wouldn't I?

STELLA. You'd be afraid.

GEOFFREY. Afraid? Who am I afraid of? Not you.

STELLA *(to Ann)*. I wish I had one that went to sleep properly.

GEOFFREY. There you are again. You said just now that dolls could walk and run and talk and I said they couldn't, and now you say they go to sleep.

ANN. Of course they can go to sleep.

FRANK. Of course they can't.

ANN. They can, because I've seen them.

GEOFFREY. Let's have a look at yours and see. (*He snatches the doll from Stella.*)

GEOFFREY. Nice bit of rag and sawdust, go to bye-byes.

STELLA. Give it to me. It's mine. Give it to me.
(*Stella chases Geoffrey round the table. She leans across the table to snatch the doll from him and knocks the vase of flowers over, breaking the vase.*)

GEOFFREY. Goodness! Now look at what we've done.

STELLA. Oh dear, it's broken! Mother's birthday present, too.

GEOFFREY. We shall catch it. (*They try to mend it.*)
How much do you think it cost, Frank?

FRANK. About ten shillings, I should think.

GEOFFREY. I can't mend it. We'd better put the flowers in the old jam-jar, but I don't know what Mother will say when she sees it. Stella, go and get the jam-jar and put the flowers in it. I'll clear up this mess. Frank, you put the bits in the coal-scuttle. (*They do as Geoffrey suggests. There is a knock at the door.*) Who's that?

THE SHARK'S TOOTH

STELLA. Mother, I expect. Go on, Geoffrey, open the door. Don't keep her waiting.

(Geoffrey goes to the door and admits Captain King.)

GEOFFREY. Come in, Captain King. I'm sorry Father hasn't got home from work yet.

CAPTAIN KING. Hello, Stella, and how are you?

STELLA. I'm very well, thank you.

CAPTAIN KING. That's right. And how are you, Geoffrey? I thought you looked as though a ghost were after you when you opened the door just now.

GEOFFREY. I'm not afraid of ghosts, Captain. It takes more than a ghost to frighten me.

CAPTAIN KING. Perhaps you haven't seen one. Why, in the Indies there were ghosts that would make your hair stand on end.

STELLA. What were they like?

CAPTAIN KING. They were all dressed in black or white. *(He takes a shark's tooth from his pocket.)* But if you carried one of these, they couldn't hurt you.

GEOFFREY. That looks rummy. What is it, Captain?

CAPTAIN KING. It's a shark's tooth.

STELLA *(disappointed)*. Oh!

ANN. Where did you get it?

CAPTAIN KING. It came from Koto Island, and it's a magic tooth.

GEOFFREY. I don't believe in magic.

STELLA. How is it a magic tooth, Captain?



Photo: E. J. Bigley

Captain King

CAPTAIN KING. It was given to me by a chief in Koto, as a wedding present because I married his daughter.

GEOFFREY. It's a funny thing to have as a wedding present, isn't it?

CAPTAIN KING. But don't forget I said it was a magic tooth. When the chief gave it to me, he said that I could have three wishes with it.

STELLA. Three wishes? Have you had them yet?

CAPTAIN KING. Not all of them. But I've had one of them.

GEOFFREY. I'll bet you didn't get what you wished for, though.

CAPTAIN KING. I'm not quite sure, but I believe I did.

FRANK. What do you mean?

GEOFFREY. What did you wish for?

CAPTAIN KING. I wished to be rescued from the island, and the next morning a British warship visited the island, and I escaped with them.

STELLA. But haven't you had your other wishes yet?

CAPTAIN KING. Oh, no. I'm keeping those until I'm in another fix.

GEOFFREY. I know what I would wish for if I had it.

STELLA. So do I.

GEOFFREY. Could I have just one wish, please? (*Captain King shakes his head.*) Please. Just one.

STELLA. Oh, Captain, we broke Mother's birthday present just now. Do you think one of your wishes could mend it?

CAPTAIN KING. Oh, I don't know, I'm sure.

FRANK. It would save them getting into trouble.

CAPTAIN KING. I think I'd better be going.

STELLA. Do let us have one wish, *please*.

CAPTAIN KING. I can't stop now.

STELLA. Oh, Captain!

CAPTAIN KING. Tell your father I'll see him in the usual place tomorrow night. Goodbye.

ALL. Goodbye.

(As Captain King is going out, he sneezes. When he takes out his handkerchief, the tooth accidentally comes with it and drops on to the floor unnoticed by anyone. Stella sees the Captain out. Geoffrey sees the tooth and picks it up.)

GEOFFREY. I say, the Captain must have dropped the shark's tooth.

(Stella comes back.)

STELLA. What's that? *(Geoffrey holds up the tooth.)*
Where did you get it?

GEOFFREY. I've just found it on the floor.

STELLA. What are you going to do with it?

GEOFFREY. Give it back to him, I suppose, after I . . .

FRANK. What?

GEOFFREY. Oh, nothing. I don't believe it is a magic tooth. *(To Frank)* Shall we try that engine again?

FRANK. I think I'd better be going now, or I might be late for dinner.

GEOFFREY. Oh, all right.

ANN. I think I'd better be going, too.

STELLA. It isn't dinner time yet, is it?

ANN. We're having an early dinner today, and I promised I wouldn't be long. Goodbye.

FRANK. Goodbye.

STELLA AND GEOFFREY. Goodbye.

(Frank and Ann go out.)

GEOFFREY *(taking the shark's tooth from his pocket)*. I wonder if there is anything in it?

STELLA. Try to get the vase mended before Mother comes back.

GEOFFREY. What shall I do?

STELLA. Hold the tooth in your right hand. *(Geoffrey takes the tooth in his right hand.)* That's right. Now wish that the vase is mended.

GEOFFREY *(deliberately)*. I wish the vase to be mended. *(They both look at the jam-jar, but nothing has happened.)* There you are, I said it wasn't magic.

STELLA. You couldn't have done it properly.

GEOFFREY. I did. I wished for the vase to be mended, and it isn't.

STELLA. The vase! *(Pointing to the jam-jar.)* That's not the vase. Where did you put the bits?

GEOFFREY. Frank put them in the coal-scuttle, but you needn't bother to look.

(Stella looks in the coal-scuttle.)

STELLA. Look! It's here, and it's mended. You can't even see a crack.

GEOFFREY. Let's have a look. Well, I'm blown! I wouldn't have believed it. Not a crack anywhere. I suppose the tooth must be a magic one after all. I wonder if I could get a train set? There is another wish left, isn't there? (*He holds up the tooth in his right hand.*) I wish for a . . .

STELLA. Hadn't we better put the flowers in the vase first before Mother comes home? You go and put some water in it. I might break it.

GEOFFREY. Oh, all right.

(*Geoffrey takes the vase and goes out. Stella immediately picks up the tooth and holds it in her right hand.*)

STELLA. I wish for a doll with fair hair and eyes that go to sleep.

(*She puts the tooth down on the table. As she does so, a knock is heard at the door. Stella stands listening. The knock is repeated as Geoffrey comes back.*)

GEOFFREY. Was that a knock at the door? (*He puts the vase on the table.*)

STELLA. Yes.

GEOFFREY (*arranging the flowers in the vase*). I expect it's Mother. We were only just in time. Take the jam-jar away. Quick!

(*Stella runs out with the jam-jar. Geoffrey goes to the door. Stella comes back, and Geoffrey returns with a parcel.*)

STELLA. Who was it?

GEOFFREY (*giving her the parcel*). It was the postman with a parcel for you.

STELLA. For me? Let me see. (*Undoes parcel.*) Look, Geoffrey! Look! It's a doll and it has fair hair. Isn't it lovely? Look! It's going to sleep. Now it's waking up.

GEOFFREY. Here's a card with it. It says you won a prize in that competition in the *Afternoon Gazette*.

STELLA. Let me see. So it does. Well, it's just what I wanted.

GEOFFREY. I'm going to have that third wish now, before anybody else comes. (*He holds up the tooth in his right hand as he wishes.*) I wish for a train set with a hundred rails, ten stations, twenty signals, ten buffers, ten points, a tunnel, a bridge, and um . . . oh, I think that will do. (*Looks round.*) I don't see it anywhere, do you?

STELLA. Perhaps it's up the chimney.

GEOFFREY. Don't try to be funny. (*Knock at door.*) Is that somebody at the door? Oh, bother! Oh, perhaps it's . . . (*Dashes to door. Then admits Captain King, and speaks in a disappointed voice.*) Come in, Captain.

(*Captain King comes in.*)

CAPTAIN KING. Have you seen that tooth? I can't find it anywhere.

GEOFFREY. Here you are. You must have dropped it. I picked it up after you'd gone.

CAPTAIN KING. Thank you very much. It's a dangerous thing to leave about.

GEOFFREY. Dangerous? Why?

CAPTAIN KING. I forgot to tell you, but when the Chief gave me the tooth, he said I must be careful not to have more than three wishes.

STELLA. Did he? Why?

CAPTAIN KING. Because anyone having a fourth wish gets haunted.

STELLA. Oh! Oh dear!

CAPTAIN KING. What's the matter?

STELLA. Oh, nothing, only I don't like ghosts.

CAPTAIN KING. Well, I don't suppose they will come to you, so there's no need for you to worry.

GEOFFREY. I don't believe in ghosts anyway, Captain.

CAPTAIN KING. Now don't forget to tell your father I'll meet him as usual tomorrow night. Goodbye.

CHILDREN. We won't forget. Goodbye.

(Captain King goes out.)

GEOFFREY. I shouldn't have thought he'd believe in ghosts, would you? He'll be haunted if anyone is, so I don't mind.

STELLA. I wonder what Mother will bring us from town?

GEOFFREY. Do you think she will let me come tonight?

STELLA. No. It wouldn't be fair if she did. You went last week.

GEOFFREY. I can't see why we both can't go. *(There is a knock at the door.)* That's Mother, I expect.

(Geoffrey goes to the door, and Mother and Father come in.)

MOTHER. Well, have you been good children? Here are your trousers, Geoffrey, and a book for you, Stella. (*Children thank Mother and examine their presents.*)

MOTHER (*seeing the doll*). Where did you get that?

STELLA. Isn't it a beauty! It's a prize for that competition I went in for.

(*Mother admires doll.*)

MOTHER. Why, how clever of you, Stella! Yes, it's lovely—mind you don't break it. Put it away now, it's time for dinner. Hurry up, Geoffrey, and clear your things away.

FATHER (*to Mother*). Where did you get that vase from?

MOTHER. Mrs. Abbott gave it to me for a birthday present.

FATHER. When?

MOTHER. This morning.

FATHER. Is it your birthday today?

MOTHER. Of course, but you never remember anything.

FATHER. Don't I? As a matter of fact, I've booked some seats for the theatre for tonight.

GEOFFREY (*jumping up*). Can I come, too?

FATHER. No, you went last week. Now, come on, get that table cleared.

GEOFFREY. Captain King's been in to see you. I told him . . .

CURTAIN

SCENE II

(*The same room. Some clothes are airing on a clothes-horse in front of the fire. Father, Mother and Stella are putting on their coats to go out. Geoffrey is watching them.*)

FATHER. It's no use making that fuss, Geoffrey. You're not going out tonight. You had your turn last week, and if I get any more sulks, you'll go straight to bed. Do you hear?

GEOFFREY. I've got nothing to do if I stay in.

MOTHER. What about that book I brought Stella this morning?

GEOFFREY. I don't want to read all night.

FATHER. I'll find you something to do. (*He goes out to the scullery.*)

MOTHER. I think you'd better take your shoes off and go straight to bed.

GEOFFREY. It's not fair. Stella gets everything she wants.

MOTHER. No, she doesn't. You have quite as much as she has, if not more. Now be a good boy.

(*Father comes in with two pairs of boots and a boot-brush.*)

FATHER (*giving them to Geoffrey*). There. You can clean these for me. That will give you something to do.

GEOFFREY. I don't want to clean those.

FATHER. You're going to, and without any more words about it.

GEOFFREY. It isn't fair.

FATHER. There's another pair outside. If I hear any more, you'll do those as well. Now then, pick up that brush and start straight away.

GEOFFREY. Oh, all right. (*He starts cleaning the boots on the table.*)

MOTHER. Take those boots off the table. What will you be doing next?

GEOFFREY. Where can I do them?

MOTHER. Do them on the floor or outside in the scullery.

GEOFFREY. I don't want to go out there.

FATHER. Come along. We shall be late if you don't hurry. Have you got your purse?

MOTHER. My purse? Of course not.

FATHER. Oh, well, never mind, come along.

MOTHER. I'm coming. I must put my hat on properly. There, how does that look?

FATHER. It looks all right to me.

MOTHER. Oh, where's my umbrella? Stella, run upstairs and get my umbrella. (*Stella goes out.*) Have you got the tickets?

FATHER. Yes, of course. (*Feeling in his pockets.*) Um—er—no, I haven't. They're not in my pocket. Let me see. I must have left them in my other jacket. Go upstairs and bring my other jacket down, Geoffrey. (*Geoffrey goes out.*) Is there anything else you've forgotten?

MOTHER. No, I don't think so.

FATHER. Good, because I'm not coming back for anything.

(Stella comes in and gives Mother her umbrella.)

MOTHER. Thank you. Now we're all ready except your Father.

(Geoffrey comes in and gives jacket to Father. Father feels in the pockets for the tickets.)

FATHER. Good. Here they are. Well, are we all ready? You're sure you haven't forgotten anything? We haven't time to come back.

MOTHER. Yes, I'm quite sure.

FATHER. Now, Geoffrey, you're not to start reading that book until you've cleaned both pairs of boots. Do you understand?

(Geoffrey nods.)

MOTHER. Now, you will be a good boy, won't you?

GEOFFREY *(sulkily)*. All right. *(Father, Mother and Stella go out. Geoffrey starts working.)* It's not fair having to work while they are at the theatre. *(He puts down the brushes, picks up the book and starts reading. Father comes in again.)*

FATHER. I left my pipe behind. *(He picks up his pipe.)* Here, I thought I told you to get those boots cleaned.

GEOFFREY. I've done them.

FATHER. Well, it doesn't look like it. Do them again. If they're not cleaned properly when I come home, I'll give you a good hiding.

GEOFFREY. I want to read this book before I do them.

FATHER. I don't mind when you do them, as long as they're done when I come home. *(Father goes out.)*

GEOFFREY. It's not fair.

(He picks up his book, reads aloud the title "The Haunted Pirate", and settles down at the centre table to enjoy himself.)

CURTAIN

SCENE III

(The Ghosts get into position while the curtain is closed. Geoffrey is well in the middle of the book now. He yawns occasionally. Gradually he begins to nod and fall asleep until his head drops forward, and the book falls to the floor with a bang. He starts up at the noise, and glances behind him. Then he has a good look round, but can see nothing. He sits down, and is quickly asleep again. From behind the clothes-horse, which is covered with clothes, the 1st Ghost gradually rises. He rubs his hands and smiles evilly. Slowly he climbs over the clothes-horse, and walks round the sleeping boy. He climbs on to the table, sits cross-legged, looking at Geoffrey, and disturbs his sleep by touching him. Then the Ghost gets off the table, picks up the book, slams it, and lets it fall with a crash. As Geoffrey jumps up, the Ghost hides behind the chair. When Geoffrey walks across to the door, he walks behind him and imitates everything Geoffrey does. Geoffrey mutters to himself that he wishes his Father and Mother would hurry up. He sits down again and catches sight of

the Ghost. He immediately screams and shouts for help. Then he pleads for mercy. Thinking of escape he walks slowly backwards to the door, keeping his eyes fixed on the 1st Ghost. When he reaches the door, a 2nd Ghost bars his way. Geoffrey does not see him until he bumps into him. Screaming afresh he rushes for the opposite door, only to find his way blocked by a 3rd Ghost. In despair, he rushes round the table, but he is caught. The 1st Ghost points to the table, but Geoffrey scrambles under it. He is forced out, and eventually climbs on the table. One Ghost takes his hands, and another his feet. The 1st Ghost is about to plunge a knife into him when there is a knocking at the door and a gruff voice is heard.)

VOICE. Hi! What's going on in here?

(The Ghosts disappear to their respective hiding-places, and Geoffrey goes to the door. A Policeman comes in.)

POLICEMAN. Who's making all that noise? Are you being murdered? You look as if you'd seen a ghost.

GEOFFREY. I *have* seen a ghost. He went behind that clothes-horse.

POLICEMAN. Ghosts? There are no such things as ghosts. Where did you say he went?

GEOFFREY (*pointing*). There. (*The Policeman begins to go across to see. Geoffrey tries to stop him.*) No, no! He's there, I tell you.

POLICEMAN. You've been dreaming. Let me have a look.

GEOFFREY. No, no! He'll kill you.



Photo: E. J. Bigley

Geoffrey and the Ghosts

POLICEMAN. Kill me? I'd like to see the ghost that could kill *me*. Out of my way, and let me have a look. I'll settle him. (*He takes out his truncheon and walks carefully on tiptoe towards the clothes-horse.*)

POLICEMAN. There's nothing here. You've been dreaming.

GEOFFREY. I'm sure he went there. I saw him.

POLICEMAN (*picking up Geoffrey's book and looking at the title*). Have you been reading this book?

GEOFFREY. Yes.

POLICEMAN. Well, this has been making you dream, that's all.

GEOFFREY. Do you think so?

POLICEMAN. Of course.

GEOFFREY. Oh, I'm not really afraid of ghosts, you know.

POLICEMAN. I don't suppose you are. Are you satisfied there aren't any in the room?

GEOFFREY. I'm all right now, thank you.

POLICEMAN. Good. Where are your father and mother?

GEOFFREY. They've gone to the theatre with my sister. They'll be back soon.

POLICEMAN. That's all right then. I must get along. Good night.

GEOFFREY. Good night. (*When the Policeman has gone, Geoffrey has a good look round and mutters to himself.*) There's nothing there, but I'm sure I saw one go behind the clothes-horse. I must have been asleep,

THE SHARK'S TOOTH

I suppose. (*Seeing the boots.*) Oh, bother those boots. Why should I clean them while the others are at the theatre? Perhaps I'd better do them. (*The door is heard opening.*) My goodness, here they are! Whatever can I do? (*He goes out to the scullery, taking his book with him, as Father, Mother and Stella come in.*)

MOTHER (*looking round*). Where's Geoffrey? (*Calling*) Geoffrey, Geoffrey.

FATHER. He's gone to bed, I expect.

MOTHER (*calling*). Geoffrey, Geoffrey. Where can he be?

STELLA. Oh dear, it's the ghosts. The ghosts have carried him off.

FATHER. Ghosts? What do you mean, Stella?

STELLA. Geoffrey had the fourth wish with Captain King's tooth.

FATHER. You didn't tell me you'd been having wishes with that tooth. Why can't you leave things alone? How many wishes did you have?

STELLA. Geoffrey had one. Then I had one, and then Geoffrey wished again.

FATHER. That's only three.

STELLA. I know, but Captain King had one himself before he came home. I told you that.

FATHER. Why did Geoffrey have the fourth wish, then?

STELLA. Because he didn't know I'd had mine. And

now Geoffrey has been taken away by the ghosts, and it's all my fault. (*She begins to cry.*)

(*Geoffrey comes in.*)

FATHER. Nonsense. Geoffrey's all right. (*He sees Geoffrey.*) Where have you been, frightening Stella like this? And what's all this nonsense about ghosts?

STELLA. Have the ghosts been after you?

GEOFFREY. I should say so, but I was ready for them. All three of them came at me together, and I knocked them over like ninepins. Ghosts can't frighten me.

STELLA. I thought they had carried you off.

GEOFFREY. Carried me off! They couldn't carry a kitten off.

FATHER. Did the ghosts let you clean those boots? (*Picks up the boots.*) You haven't touched them. You know what I promised you, don't you?

GEOFFREY. Well, Father, I . . .

FATHER. Come here and bend down. (*Geoffrey bends down. Father sees the shape of a book in Geoffrey's trousers as he bends down.*) What's this in your trousers? (*Pulls book out.*) You young scamp. (*Begins to laugh. They all join in except Geoffrey.*) Whatever will you do next?

GEOFFREY. Have my supper, I hope.

CURTAIN

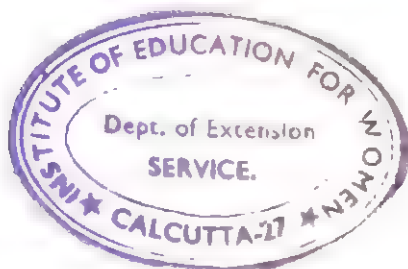
THE RUBY AND THE APPLE

Approximate acting time : thirty minutes.

CHARACTERS

FATHER (MR. PARKER)
MOTHER (MRS. PARKER)
GEOFFREY, their son
STELLA, their daughter
CAPTAIN KING, Mr. Parker's friend
MRS. ABBOTT, Mrs. Parker's friend
FRANK, Geoffrey's friend
ANN, Stella's friend
POLICEMAN
TWO THIEVES

No fees are required for the performance of this play in schools, but the author and publisher would appreciate a reference to themselves on any programme or leaflet, and would be most interested to have a copy.



ESSENTIAL PROPERTIES

SCENE I

On stage.

Carpet.

Four chairs.

Newspaper on one chair.

Poker.

Mat.

Centre table.

Clothes for ironing.

Iron and iron-stand.

Side table.

Dish of rosy apples with
two green ones.*Off stage.**(Right-hand side.)*

Hats and coats for Mother and Stella.

A tray with four cups, four saucers, four plates, teapot,
one milk jug, one sugar-basin, one plate of bread and
butter, four spoons.

One kettle.

One cup and saucer for Policeman.

Glass of water for 1st thief.

Sugar-basin and knife for Geoffrey.

(Left-hand side.)

Ruby, knife and handkerchief for 1st thief.

Hat and coat for Father.

Shilling and sixpence for Father.

SCENE II

On stage.

Carpet.

Four chairs.

Newspaper on one chair.

Poker.

Mat.

Centre table.

Side table.

Dish of apples.

*Off stage.**(Left-hand side.)*

Pistol for 1st thief.

£50 note for Policeman.

Dress in parcel for Stella.

THE RUBY AND THE APPLE

SCENE I

(A small living-room with a table in the centre and one to the left, on which is a dish of fruit. The fireplace is on the right of the stage. Mother is ironing. There is a knock at the door. Mother goes to the door.)

MOTHER. Come in, Mrs. Abbott. What's wrong?
You're looking worried.

MRS. ABBOTT. It's our little Dorothy. She's all spotty and sick, and I don't know what to do.

MOTHER. "Spotty," did you say?

MRS. ABBOTT. Yes, spots all over her face.

MOTHER. Are you sure they're not freckles?

MRS. ABBOTT. They only came on her this afternoon.

MOTHER. That's measles, then. You can depend upon it. That's measles.

MRS. ABBOTT. What can I do?

MOTHER. Put her to bed and keep her warm.

MRS. ABBOTT. I'm that worried I don't know what to do. Will you come across and have a look at her?

MOTHER. Of course I will, but there's not much I can do. *(Collects up her ironing things.)* Don't worry, Mrs. Abbott. She'll be all right. I'll go and put my hat on now straight away. *(Mother goes out with ironed laundry, and comes back putting on her hat.)* Don't worry. We'll soon have her well again. Come

along. (*They go out. A little while after they have gone out, a knock is heard. After a short interval there is another knock. A man enters and looks round cautiously. He beckons to someone outside and another man enters.*)

2ND THIEF. All clear?

1ST THIEF. Sssh!

2ND THIEF. What's the matter?

1ST THIEF (*pointing to scullery*). See if there's anybody out there. (*2nd thief goes out.*)

2ND THIEF (*coming in*). No, I can't see anybody.

1ST THIEF. See if there's a way out through the back door. (*2nd thief goes out. 1st thief looks round the room.*)

2ND THIEF (*coming in*). There's a gate at the top of the garden that leads to the lane.

1ST THIEF. Right.

2ND THIEF. What are you going to do?
(*1st thief takes a ruby from his pocket and holds it up.*)

1ST THIEF. I'm going to hide this ruby in here, and come back for it tonight.

2ND THIEF. Let's have another look at it, mate. What a pretty little bead! Where shall we put it?

1ST THIEF. Somewhere where it won't be noticed, of course.

2ND THIEF. Under the carpet. They wouldn't see it there.

1ST THIEF. No, that won't do. If the police found we had been here, that's the first place they'd look.

2ND THIEF. Oh. (*Looking round.*) Here's a drawer.
Would that do?

1ST THIEF. No. That's no better than the carpet.

2ND THIEF. Why not keep it on you? You'll never get caught.

1ST THIEF. I want them to catch me . . . when I've hidden it.

2ND THIEF. Why?

1ST THIEF. Because they'll think I'm innocent if I haven't got it. See? They can't prove I took it if I haven't got it, can they? The only trouble is . . . where can I hide it?

2ND THIEF. Put it under the carpet. My missus never sweeps under the carpet.

1ST THIEF. I tell you it's no good. I know a better plan than that. Come here. Which of these apples would you *not* take?

2ND THIEF (*looking them over and picking up a green one*).
This one.

1ST THIEF. Right. And why not?

2ND THIEF. Because it looks sour, of course.

1ST THIEF. Good. Now if I could hide the ruby in that apple, the chances are that it would still be there tonight.

2ND THIEF. But how can you hide a ruby inside an apple?

1ST THIEF. Watch. If I carefully cut this out, and scoop out some of the inside, the ruby will go inside. The

outside piece will fit in its place again, and nobody will notice it because they won't even look at the apple. See?

2ND THIEF. Suppose they eat the apple?

1ST THIEF. You needn't worry about . . . What's that?
(*Mother is heard returning.*) Come on, the back way.
(*They go out. Mother comes in and begins getting the tea. Stella comes in.*)

STELLA. Hello, Mummy. Did you get my new socks this afternoon?

MOTHER. No, I've been too busy ironing. We'll go directly after tea before the shops close.

STELLA. I do wish I could have a new dress, too. Can I have a new dress?

MOTHER. And where do you think the money is coming from to buy it? No, you'll have to be content with what you've got for a bit longer.

STELLA. Can I ask Daddy when he comes home? I should like a new dress.

MOTHER. Go and see if the kettle's boiling. (*Stella goes out.*)

STELLA (*coming back*). Yes, it's boiling hard. Shall I make the tea?

MOTHER. Yes, please, but don't scald yourself.
(*Stella goes out with the teapot. Mother continues getting the tea. Stella comes back.*)

STELLA. Can I do anything else?

MOTHER. Did you turn the gas out? Bring the kettle

in and stand it by the fire. Now if your Father will hurry up, we'll have tea. Go to the door and see if he's coming.

(Stella brings the kettle in from the scullery and stands it by the fire. Then she goes to the door and comes back.)

STELLA. He's just turned the corner. I'll go and meet him. *(She goes out. Shortly afterwards she comes in with her Father.)*

FATHER *(coming in)*. But how did he do it?

STELLA. He was trying to put worms down my back, and tore my dress as I was running away.

FATHER. He'll have to buy you one out of his pocket money.

STELLA. But he spent it all. He hasn't saved a half-penny.

FATHER *(pointing to the dress she is wearing)*. What's wrong with this dress?

STELLA. I've had it for ages and ages. I don't want it to last for ever.

FATHER. I'll think about it.

(Father goes into the scullery to wash his hands. Stella begins to follow him.)

MOTHER. Come along, Stella, and have your tea, or you won't be ready in time. *(They sit down and begin tea. Father comes back.)* Did you see Geoffrey on the way home? He gets later and later every day.

FATHER. Does he? What makes him late?

(Father picks up a newspaper.)

MOTHER. I don't know. Getting into trouble, I suppose. I never knew such a boy for getting into trouble. It's about time you took him in hand.

FATHER (*absent-mindedly*). Yes, yes.

MOTHER. What he wants is a little more attention from you.

FATHER. Yes, yes.

MOTHER. It looks to me as if he's running wild. He never takes the slightest notice of anything I say.

FATHER. Yes, yes.

MOTHER. Yes, and you're as bad as he is. *You* don't listen to anything I say, either. All you do is to pick up the newspaper and bury yourself in that.

FATHER (*looking up*). What's that?

MOTHER. You don't care twopence what happens to the boy.

FATHER. Why do you say that? Only last Saturday I took him to the football match. What more can I do?

MOTHER. Football match! What he wants is a little less football, I think. He's always kicking his boots to pieces.

(*Father turns to the newspaper again.*)

FATHER. All right, I'll speak to him when he comes in.

MOTHER. Yes, and so will I.

FATHER. Can I have another cup of tea, please?

(*Mother pours out a cup of tea for Father. As she hands*

it to him, she sees an advertisement on the back of the newspaper he is reading.)

MOTHER. That looks a nice coat.

FATHER. Where?

MOTHER. Here on the back of your paper. (*Father looks.*)

FATHER (*reading advertisement*). I'll buy you one for Christmas. You can have two if you like. They're only fifty guineas each.

MOTHER. Oh, isn't it lovely! I wish I had one like that.

STELLA. Daddy, will you buy me a dress?

FATHER. I'll think about it.

STELLA. But I want to know now, because we're going to town in a minute or two.

(*Geoffrey comes in.*)

MOTHER. Where have you been?

GEOFFREY. Coming home.

MOTHER. Of course you have. But you haven't been all this time coming home. What mischief have you been up to tonight?

GEOFFREY. I've been helping teacher.

FATHER. It's about time you got home earlier than this, Geoffrey. Get on with your tea now, and don't come home late again.

MOTHER. You'll get no pocket money if you go on like

this. Hurry up with your tea, because I want to go to town.

(Mother and Stella get up to put their coats on. A knock is heard at the door.)

MOTHER. Go and see who is at the door, Stella. *(Stella goes to the door.)*

STELLA. Mummy, it's a policeman.

FATHER. Now what on earth can he want?

(Geoffrey gets up as soon as he hears that a policeman is at the door and disappears into the scullery. Stella brings in the Policeman.)

POLICEMAN. I've come to see you about your Geoffrey. He takes some looking after, doesn't he?

FATHER. Oh, he's not a bad lad. A bit mischievous sometimes, but he's generally quiet and obedient enough.

POLICEMAN. Well, he hasn't been very quiet lately.

MOTHER. What has he been up to?

POLICEMAN. Farmer Giles keeps complaining that boys are playing in his corn, so tonight I waited for them, and your Geoffrey was with them.

MOTHER. I'm sure there's a mistake somewhere, because Geoffrey is such a good boy. I know he wouldn't play in the corn purposely, would you, Geoffrey? *(She sees he is not there.)* Where has he gone? Geoffrey! *(There is no answer.)*

POLICEMAN. He doesn't seem to be very obedient now.

MOTHER. I expect he's washing his hands. He's always

very particular to see that his hands are clean before meals.

POLICEMAN. So he's only just come in, has he?

MOTHER. He's been staying at school helping his teacher.

POLICEMAN. Has he? He didn't stay very long tonight.

MOTHER (*to Father*). Perhaps you'd better go and see where he is. (*Father goes out.*) He can't be far away. He was here a minute ago. (*Father comes back with Geoffrey.*) Geoffrey, did you stop at school tonight?

GEOFFREY. Yes.

FATHER. For how long?

GEOFFREY. Oh, not very long.

FATHER. What made you so late then?

GEOFFREY. I was frightening the birds away from Farmer Giles's corn.

POLICEMAN. Did Farmer Giles ask you to frighten the birds away?

GEOFFREY. Well, he didn't exactly ask me.

POLICEMAN. Of course he didn't, and you had a very funny way of frightening them away too! Hiding in the corn, that's what you were doing.

GEOFFREY. If you don't hide, the birds won't come.

POLICEMAN. Who wants them to come?

GEOFFREY. You can't frighten them away if they don't come.

FATHER. Be quiet, Geoffrey.

POLICEMAN. I thought I'd come along and warn you, because some of these boys are becoming a nuisance.

MOTHER. Of course, Officer. Will you have a cup of tea?

POLICEMAN. Well, I don't mind if I do.

(Mother pours out a cup of tea for him, which he begins to drink.)

MOTHER. Is it sweet enough?

POLICEMAN. It's just right, thank you. Did you hear about that robbery this morning?

FATHER. No.

POLICEMAN. There's an account of it in the paper. Mr. Gem, the jeweller, had a ruby stolen worth a thousand pounds.

FATHER. Have you caught the thief yet?

POLICEMAN. No, but we've got our eyes on someone. If I can capture him with the ruby, I shall be made a sergeant and get the fifty pounds reward.

FATHER. Fifty pounds reward, did you say?

POLICEMAN. Yes. *(He drinks his tea and gets up.)* Well, I must be off, and don't you forget, young man, to keep away from the corn. Good night. *(He goes out.)*

FATHER *(looking at newspaper)*. They've got the story of that robbery in here. *(Reads.)*

MOTHER. I'm going to town. Are you coming?

FATHER *(reading)*. What?

MOTHER. Are you coming?

FATHER (*looking up*). Where?

MOTHER. You never listen to anything. Are you coming to town tonight?

FATHER. Why?

MOTHER. I never knew such a man for asking questions. To get a pair of socks for Stella, if you must know.

FATHER. No, I don't think I'll come tonight. I want to read about this robbery.

MOTHER. Will you give me some money, then, for the bus fare.

FATHER. I thought you wanted something. Here's a shilling. Will that do?

MOTHER. Yes, thank you.

STELLA. Will you buy me a new dress, Daddy?

GEOFFREY. Oh, you're always having new dresses.

STELLA. And you're always having new boots.

GEOFFREY. No, I'm not.

STELLA. Yes, you are.

FATHER. Quiet, children, or I'll send you to bed.

(*They make faces at one another.*)

MOTHER. Come along, Stella, or the shops will be shut.

(*To Father*) Will you and Geoffrey put the tea-things away and wash up?

FATHER. Oh dear!

MOTHER. I shan't be late. (*Mother and Stella go out.*)

FATHER. Come along, my lad, you can help with this.
(*They begin clearing the table.*) What they want all these things for is more than I can understand.

GEOFFREY (*balancing four plates and four saucers on a cup*).
Can you do this, Father?

FATHER. Look out! (*Geoffrey nearly drops them.*) Take them out properly. (*Geoffrey goes out with the dishes and Father collects up the remaining dishes. As he is going out, Geoffrey comes back, trips over the mat and crashes into Father, who drops the dishes and breaks some of them.*) There you are! I knew something would happen, you little idiot. Now what will your Mother say?

GEOFFREY. I couldn't help it, Father. I tripped over the mat.

FATHER. Why don't you look where you're going then?
You're always falling over yourself.

GEOFFREY. Shall I see if I can fit the pieces together?

FATHER. What's the good of that?

GEOFFREY. I was only trying to help.

FATHER. Trying to help! Look at the mess.

(*They begin to pick up the broken pieces of crockery. There is a knock at the door. Father goes to the door and admits Captain King.*)

FATHER. Come in, come in, and make yourself at home.

CAPTAIN KING. I came round to see if you would like to have a look at my new car?

FATHER. When did you get it?

CAPTAIN KING. This afternoon.

FATHER. Right, I'll put my coat on straight away.

CAPTAIN KING. There's no hurry. I left my wife cleaning it. (*He sits down.*)

FATHER. I wish somebody would do something for me.
I seem to spend all my spare time washing up.

CAPTAIN KING. Would you like to come for a ride?

FATHER. When?

CAPTAIN KING. Now.

FATHER. Oh yes. Where shall we go?

CAPTAIN KING. Oh, I thought we might go for a little run and get back in time for supper.

FATHER. Geoffrey, you can look after the house while I'm away, and don't get into any more mischief.

GEOFFREY. Can I come too?

FATHER. No. If you had behaved yourself, I might have let you.

GEOFFREY (*sitting down*). Oh!

CAPTAIN KING. Let him come, he'll be all right.

FATHER. No. This will teach him a lesson. (*Father and Captain King go out.*)

GEOFFREY. They never let me do anything.

(*There is a knock at the door. Geoffrey goes to the door and admits Frank and Ann.*)

GEOFFREY. Hello.

FRANK. Can you come out?

GEOFFREY. No, I've got to stay in.

FRANK (*seeing the broken plates*). Have you broken something?

GEOFFREY. I didn't, but I had the blame for it. I get the blame for everything.

FRANK. So do I. Ann is never blamed for anything.
(*There is another knock at the door. Geoffrey goes to the door.*)

1ST THIEF. Will you give me a drink of water, please?
(*The thief comes into the room uninvited, and immediately looks at the fruit dish.*)

GEOFFREY. I'll get you a drink of water.

1ST THIEF. Thank you, thank you. (*Geoffrey goes out.*)

I suppose your father isn't home from work yet?

FRANK. We don't live here.

1ST THIEF (*pointing to scullery door*). Does he?

FRANK. Yes. We came to see him.

ANN. I didn't. I came to see Stella, only she's not in.

1ST THIEF. So there's Stella too, is there?

(*Geoffrey comes back with a glass of water.*)

GEOFFREY. Who wants Stella?

1ST THIEF. Nobody, my dear, nobody. I was just wondering where she was.

GEOFFREY. She's gone to town with Mother to get some new socks.

1ST THIEF. Your mother's gone to town, too? And your father's not home from work yet, I suppose?

GEOFFREY. He came home before I did.

1ST THIEF. So you're not looking after the house, then?

GEOFFREY. Yes, I am.

1ST THIEF. Has your father gone out, too?

GEOFFREY. Yes.

1ST THIEF. I suppose he won't be back for a long time yet?

GEOFFREY. I don't know. He's gone for a motor ride with Captain King. Why do you want to know?

1ST THIEF. So your mother and father are both out, are they?

GEOFFREY. Here is your water. Don't you want it?

1ST THIEF. Thank you, thank you. (*He drinks.*) That's better. I suppose you couldn't spare one of those apples, could you?

GEOFFREY. Please take one. I'm sure Mother wouldn't mind. (*He offers them to the thief.*)

1ST THIEF. I'll just take this green sour-looking one.

GEOFFREY. Don't take that one. Try this rosy one.

1ST THIEF. No, no. I never eat rosy apples. I like sour things, I do. When you're old like me, you don't like sweet things. (*He carefully examines the apple, and then nibbles a bit.*) Oh, it's beautiful and sour. This is worth pounds to me.

ANN. I don't like sour apples, but I like lemonade.

1ST THIEF. Of course you do. That shows you're getting old.

ANN. I'm not very old yet.



Photo: E. J. Bigley

The Two Thieves

1ST THIEF. No, but you soon will be.

FRANK. I want to be grown-up. How can you tell when you're grown-up?

1ST THIEF. When you like sour things better than sweet things, you can be sure you are grown-up.

(The thief puts his apple on the table, and takes out his handkerchief to blow his nose.)

GEOFFREY. I wonder if there's another sour apple here?
(He picks one up.) Is this one sour enough?

1ST THIEF. It might be.
(Geoffrey takes a bite and pulls a face.)

GEOFFREY. I don't like that one. *(He puts it down on the table by the thief's apple.)*

FRANK. Let me try. *(He picks up the thief's apple by mistake, takes a bite and keeps it in his hand.)* I don't want to be grown-up if you eat apples like that.

1ST THIEF. I must be getting along now. Thank you very kindly. I mustn't forget my apple. I'll have that for my supper. *(He picks up the wrong apple.)*
Good night, good night.

ALL. Good night. *(The thief goes out.)*

ANN. Thank goodness he's gone, the dirty old thing!

GEOFFREY. I don't believe what he said about grown-ups liking sour things. Does your father like sour apples?

FRANK. I don't think so, but he likes lemonade.

GEOFFREY. So do I, so do you, so does Ann. Don't you, Ann?

ANN. Of course I do.

GEOFFREY. Do you know, I believe he came in for something.

FRANK. Do you mean he's stolen something?

GEOFFREY. I don't know, but I wouldn't be surprised.

ANN. He can't have stolen anything, because I was looking at him all the time.

FRANK. Did you notice he kept on about your father and mother being out?

GEOFFREY. Yes, why?

FRANK. Because he was afraid they would send him off, I expect.

GEOFFREY. He couldn't have taken anything, because there's nothing here for him to take, except an apple, and he's welcome to that.

FRANK. I wonder why he wanted a sour apple, I'm sure he'd rather have a sweet one than a sour one. Anybody would. Look at it! (*He holds his apple out.*)

GEOFFREY. We'd better not leave it about, or I shall be in for more trouble when Mother comes home. If I eat a bit, will you have some?

ANN. Can I have some sugar on it?

GEOFFREY. All right, I'll get some. (*He goes out to get some sugar.*)

ANN. Are you going to have some, Frank?

FRANK. I don't mind having some with sugar.
(*Geoffrey comes back with a sugar-basin and a knife.*)

GEOFFREY. Here you are. I'll cut it up. (*He begins to cut the apple.*) It seems hard in the middle. (*He continues cutting the apple and eventually finds the ruby.*) Look! Look! What's this?

ANN. It's a bead.

FRANK. What a lovely colour! Let me have a look.

ANN. It's like a ruby.

FRANK. But how did it get into the apple? Rubies don't grow in apples.

ANN. They might do, like pearls in oysters.

GEOFFREY. I wonder if it is a ruby?

FRANK. That's what that man was after, and he took the wrong apple.

GEOFFREY. Perhaps this is the ruby that was lost. If it is, we shall get fifty pounds reward. Let's go and see.

FRANK. Where?

GEOFFREY. They'll know at the police station. Come on. (*They all go out in a hurry.*)

CURTAIN

SCENE II

(*The same room, twenty minutes later. Father and Captain King come in.*)

FATHER. Won't you stay and have some supper?

CAPTAIN KING. No, thank you. I must get back home. My wife will be thinking I've had an accident. You know what women are for worrying.

FATHER. I know. Nobody's ever safe unless they are on the spot. I suppose Geoffrey's gone to bed. I hate coming in to an empty house.

CAPTAIN KING. Well, I must be getting off. Good night.

FATHER. Good night, and thanks for the ride. (*Captain King goes out.*) Mind that front step.

(*Father comes in and sits in front of the fire, reading his newspaper. After a few moments, the 1st thief comes in with a pistol.*)

1ST THIEF. Hands up.

FATHER. Who are you? (*He bends down to pick up the poker.*)

1ST THIEF. Hands up. Leave that poker alone or I'll fire.

FATHER. What do you want?

1ST THIEF. I want that boy of yours, and a green apple he has.

FATHER. What are you talking about?

1ST THIEF. Where's that boy? Hurry up, I haven't all night to spend on you. Where is he?

FATHER. I don't know.

1ST THIEF. Why couldn't you say so before? (*Father stoops again to pick up poker.*) Leave that poker alone or I shall shoot. (*The thief begins to look in drawers, muttering to himself from time to time. He keeps glancing at Father.*)

FATHER. Is that the police at the door? (*The thief looks*

round startled and listens.) Feeling a bit nervous, aren't you?

1ST THIEF. Shut up.

FATHER. I shall talk in my own house if I want to.

1ST THIEF. Shut up and keep your hands up.

(The thief begins to look under the carpet.)

FATHER. You won't find any dust under there. If my wife could see you now, you'd have a bit of her tongue, and serve you right.

1ST THIEF. Hang your wife!

FATHER. Might get a worse one if I did.

1ST THIEF *(threatening him with his pistol)*. Will you be quiet? *(He continues his search.)*

FATHER. Are you looking for the boy or the apple? If you want an apple, take one of those over there. Perhaps Geoffrey has gone to get an evening paper to see the football results. He's very keen on football.

1ST THIEF. If I had him here, I'd screw his neck.

(Geoffrey comes in very softly. He creeps up behind the thief and jumps on him from behind. A fight ensues with Father joining in. The thief shakes them both off, picks up his pistol and covers them with it.)

GEOFFREY. We nearly got him, Father.

1ST THIEF. Thought you had me, didn't you, Mr. Clever? Tell me where that ruby is and I'll let you both go.

FATHER. What ruby?

1ST THIEF. Where is it?

FATHER. I don't know what you're talking about.

1ST THIEF (*to Geoffrey*). Have you seen it?

GEOFFREY. Yes.

1ST THIEF. Where is it?

GEOFFREY. Find out.

1ST THIEF. I'm going to. I'll give you ten seconds to make up your mind. One, two, three, four, five, (*he points his pistol at Geoffrey*) six, seven...

GEOFFREY. Stop!

1ST THIEF. I knew you'd be sensible. Now tell me where it is and I'll let you go.

GEOFFREY. No.

1ST THIEF (*pointing pistol at him again*). Seven, eight, nine...

(*The Policeman comes in.*)

POLICEMAN. Stop! Now I've got you, my lad. I thought I should find you here.

1ST THIEF. That's very kind of you, Inspector.

POLICEMAN. I'm not an inspector, I'm a constable. But I shall be made a sergeant when I've got you safely under lock and key.

1ST THIEF. Lock and key? You wouldn't do that, would you?

POLICEMAN. What are you doing here with that pistol? You know pistols aren't allowed, don't you?

1ST THIEF. It doesn't work, Constable.

POLICEMAN. Oh, (*taking the pistol from the thief*) and I suppose it isn't loaded either? No, my lad, you're for it this time. (*He puts the pistol on the table.*)

1ST THIEF. I'm sure you've made a mistake. I only came here for . . .

POLICEMAN. I know what you came here for. We caught your mate this afternoon, and he told us that you hid the ruby in an apple. Very clever, that.

1ST THIEF. I haven't got the ruby.

POLICEMAN. I know you haven't.

1ST THIEF. What have you done with it?

POLICEMAN. It's where you can't get it, thanks to Geoffrey.

GEOFFREY. Shall I get the fifty pounds reward?

POLICEMAN. Yes, I came round to give it to you. Here you are. I don't suppose you've seen a note like that before. (*He gives Geoffrey a fifty pound note.*)

GEOFFREY. Is it for me?

POLICEMAN. Yes, and Mr. Gem says he'll give a reward to Frank and Ann as well.

(*The thief makes a grab at the pistol. The policeman pulls him away from the table towards the door.*)

1ST THIEF. I wasn't going to do anything, Constable.

POLICEMAN. Leave that pistol alone then.

GEOFFREY. What shall I do with it, Father? Shall I give it to Mother?

(*Mother and Stella come in. Mother does not see the thief and policeman, who are behind the door.*)

MOTHER. Thank goodness I'm home. Why haven't you gone to bed, Geoffrey? As soon as my back is . . . (*She sees the policeman.*) Geoffrey! What have you been doing now? Didn't I tell you at tea-time that you would get yourself into serious trouble if you didn't mend your ways? Just as if I haven't enough worry without the policeman having to come round here after you.

GEOFFREY. But, Mother, I . . .

MOTHER. I don't want to hear any of your excuses. Take your boots off and go straight to bed.

GEOFFREY. But, Mother, I . . .

MOTHER. Did you hear me? (*She shakes him.*)

FATHER. If you'd only listen a minute.

MOTHER. Listen, listen, listen, that's all I do day after day. It's your fault just as much as the boy's. You ought to have taken him in hand months ago. You know yourself he has gradually been getting worse.

POLICEMAN. But this time Geoffrey . . .

MOTHER. I know, you needn't tell me. If you did your job properly, I shouldn't find you here now. And what is this pistol doing in the house? (*Pointing to thief*) And who is this?

POLICEMAN. He's a desperate character. That's what he is.

MOTHER. Then what is he doing here?

GEOFFREY. He was after the ruby.

MOTHER. I told you to go to bed.

POLICEMAN. Don't be too hard on him, ma'am. He's got the reward.

MOTHER. What reward?

POLICEMAN. He found the ruby that this 'ere prisoner stole from Mr. Gem.

GEOFFREY. And I got fifty pounds reward.

MOTHER. Fifty pounds reward!

POLICEMAN. I'll be getting back to the station now, and lock him up where he'll be safe. Come on, you. Good night.

ALL. Good night.

MOTHER. Fifty pounds reward!

FATHER. I tried to tell you, but you wouldn't listen.

MOTHER. Well, Geoffrey, and to think you'd got the reward all the time. Let me see it. Fifty pounds! What are you going to do with it?

GEOFFREY. I don't know.

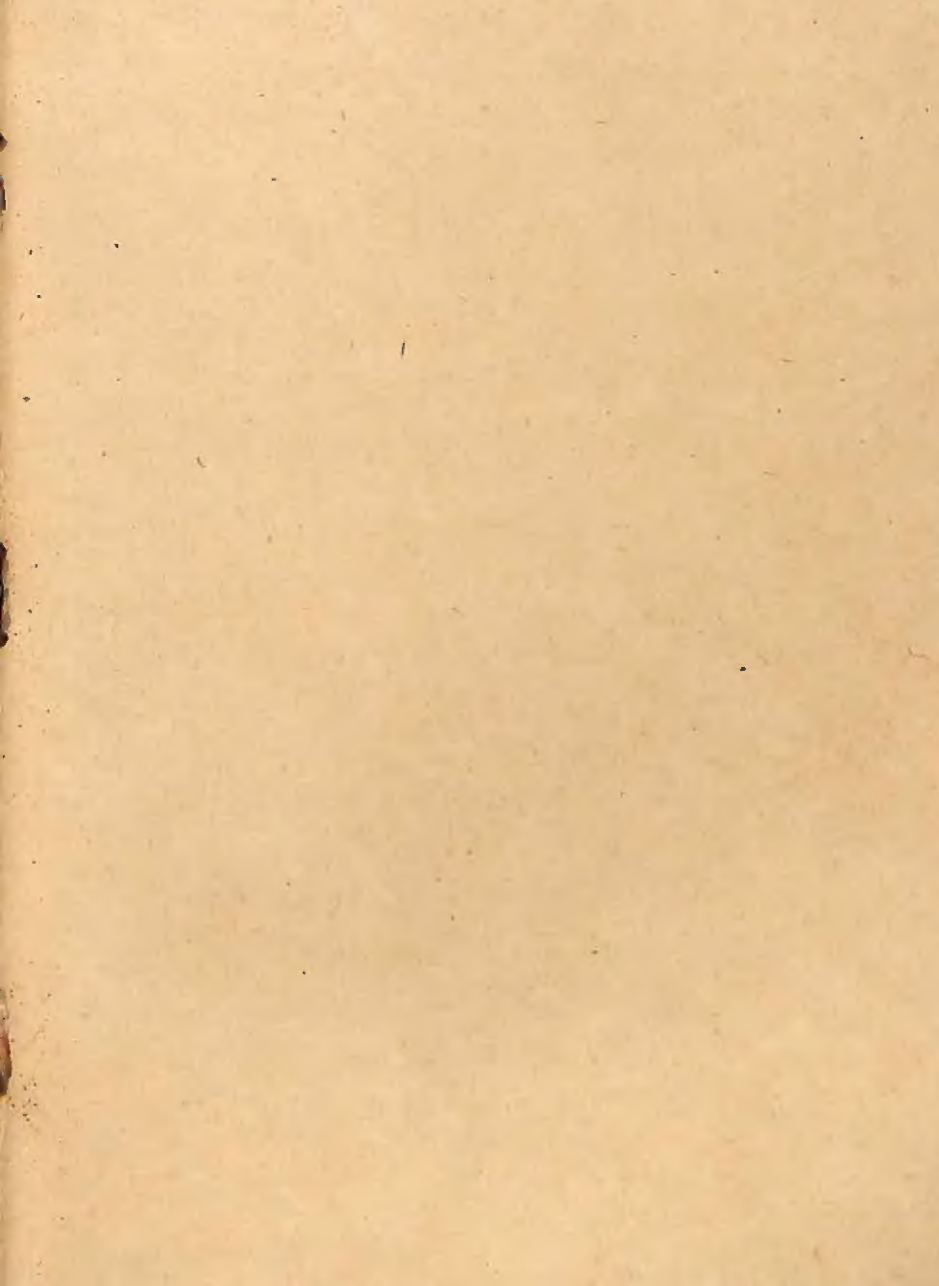
MOTHER. You shall have a new suit, Geoffrey.

GEOFFREY. And Stella can have her new dress.

FATHER (*to Mother*). And you can have your fifty guinea coat.

MOTHER. What would you like for your supper, Geoffrey?

CURTAIN





MODERN PLAYS FOR SCHOOLS

THE EMPTY HOUSE

AND OTHER PLAYS

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MANILLA
COVER